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AUTHOR Edelsky, Carole; Hudelson, Sarah

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ABSTRACT

This document presents the view that for teaching and learning written language, teachers and students in bilingual education programs must have autonomy and must be able to appropriately account for local conditions. Upper-level government policies should be broad, non-specific, and linked to appropriate general goals. Diverse and complex local contexts preclude the establishment of uniform policies, contexts such as teachers' bilinguality and biliteracy, language use in the community, and pressure from regional, state, and national forces. Issues that should be considered when developing local policies include the nature of written language acquisition, the language resources available, the treatment of written products in each language, and the value and consequence of writing ability. (MSE)

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Center for the Study of Writing

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CONTEXTUAL COMPLEXITIES: WRITTEN LANGUAGE POLICIES FOR BILINGUAL PROGRAMS

Carole Edelsky
Sarah Hudelson

June, 1989

University of California, Berkeley
Carnegie Mellon University

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University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720

Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

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CONTEXTUAL COMPLEXITIES: WRITTEN LANGUAGE POLICIES FOR BILINGUAL PROGRAMS

by

Carole Edelsky, Arizona State University
Sarah Hudelson, University of Miami

INTRODUCTION

Imagine this situation. You are interviewing for the position of director of bilingual/second language education in an urban school district of almost 100,000 students. Until twenty years ago, the district's student population was eighty-five percent Caucasian and fifteen percent Black, with a few Mexican-American migrant children. Since that time immigration has resulted in an influx of students from a variety of ethnic and language backgrounds. The largest population of non-English speakers, about 10,000 in number, is Hispanic. The earliest Hispanic immigrants were of Cuban origin, followed by Venezuelans and Colombians, but now most of the Spanish speakers entering the school district come from war-torn Central America. Most of the first waves of Spanish-speaking immigrant children came from well-educated middle class families. Many of the more recent immigrants have not been to school or have had their schooling interrupted by war.

The next most populous group of immigrants (about 1000 students) are of Haitian origin. The home language is Haitian Creole. The majority of the Haitian students enrolled in this school system have not been to school in their own country. The few who did go to school in Haiti were in schools conducted in French, a language the children did not use in their homes. Only after the Duvaliers were overthrown in 1986 did Haiti award Haitian Creole official language status along with French. And only in the last five years has any Haitian Creole been permitted to be a medium of instruction.

Another smaller group of immigrants are Southeast Asian refugees from Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos. The educational backgrounds (as well as the languages) of these 500 students vary. Most of the more recent arrivals have

spent considerable time in refugee camps waiting to come to this country. In these camps schooling focused on teaching English.

There is also a group of about 100 Russian speakers in the schools, since this district is one of the official ports of entry for Russian Jewish immigrants. In addition to these non-English speakers, there are small numbers of students from more than eighty other language groups, including Afghani, Arabic, Chinese, French, and Portuguese.

Student populations vary tremendously from school to school. Some schools are almost 100% Hispanic or American Black and Haitian. Others are almost exclusively White Non-Hispanic with a few Non-English speakers from different native language backgrounds. And there is every possible combination between those two extremes.

One of the questions posed during the interview is the following: Given the situation just described, what kind of a design would you propose for bilingual and/or second language instruction in the school district? More specifically, what would you propose in terms of the language or languages used for non-English speaking students' writing and reading instruction?

From our perspective, the "ideal" or theoretically preferred answer would be that students' native languages would be used in written language instruction, that students would have an opportunity to develop first as readers and writers in their home languages and then gradually add on English literacy. We base our ideal answer on: 1) the theoretical stance, articulated by UNESCO (1953), for initial literacy in the vernacular followed by second language literacy; 2) research evidence which has demonstrated that quality bilingual education programs benefit children in terms of both their academic and English language achievement (General Accounting Office, 1987; Hakuta, 1986; Rosier & Holm, 1979; Troike, 1981) and on our own work in bilingual education (see, for example, Edelsky, 1986; Hudelson, 1987).

But while there may be a theoretically "correct" answer, the educational and noneducational realities that individual communities face--the conditions permitting (or not)--make it impossible to offer one policy regarding written language instruction that will be appropriate for all educational scenes. Therefore, instead of offering a single policy, we will present a general position. Then we will argue against national or state-level policies that are highly specified by pointing out just a few of the complex variations that can exist between any two bilingual programs. We follow this discussion by elaborating some of the issues that must be considered by those making local decisions so that their schools can be guided by sensitive, informed policies that work well in their own localities.

Our position is: For teaching and learning written language use, teachers and students must have autonomy and must be able to appropriately account for

local conditions.[1] Therefore, upper level governmental policies should be broad, non-specific and linked to appropriate *general* goals. Local program policies should be developed locally to consider (but not always acquiesce to) the details of the local situation while still leaving responsibility for major decisions to individual teachers. We take this position because learning to write in school (whether or not in a school with a bilingual program) always happens in multiple co-occurring contexts, because each of those contexts has profound effects on the learning and teaching of writing inside the classroom (see Edelsky, 1986, for a discussion of one case), and because the contexts are complex in ways that may not be immediately obvious.

CONTEXTUAL VARIATION PRECLUDING UNIFORM POLICIES

The Languages Involved

Writing occurs during time and group arrangements within classrooms, within schools, within communities, within school districts, within larger geographic and political regions which exist at certain historical times and are brought to life by people with varying interests and beliefs. Although larger contexts influence smaller and vice versa, and although the smaller contexts are tied together at least through their membership in the same gigantic political-economic-social-historical context (e.g., the United States in 1987), these smaller contexts present a dizzying variety of details.

In the United States, the "other" school language, which Fishman (1976) calls the marked language, may not be the student's home language (e.g., the students may speak non-standard Puerto Rican Spanish and be placed in a Standard Mexican Spanish bilingual program in Chicago). If the non-English school language *is* the student's home language, it is not simply an uncomplicated "other." Students may come to school speaking a standardized dialect of a world language (e.g., Standard Mexico City Spanish), a non-standardized dialect of a world language (e.g., a non-standard lower class dialect of Mexican Spanish), a standardized dialect of a regional written language (e.g., Standard Vietnamese), a non-standardized dialect of a regional language with a long written tradition (e.g., certain dialects of Chinese), a regional language without a long written tradition

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[1] On occasion we have been asked to specify what we think would be appropriate policies or programs for some of the situational characteristics we describe. To be true to our call for autonomy for local administrators, teachers, and students, we believe we must refrain from specifying policies or programs. To do so would reify our suggestions while implying that one could optimally and mechanically relate condition A, condition C, and condition F and policy #1, conditions B, D, and E and policy #2, etc. Even worse, it would contradict our major point. That is, the complexity of each situation, which can only be known by insiders and sensitive, longtime outside observers, requires tailor-made locally specified policies about written language education, not policies generated in the abstract, by outsiders, to fit generic combinations of features.

(e.g., Hopi or Haitian Creole). Furthermore, there are many possibilities for what varieties of English are used in the students' communities.

Teachers' Bilinguality and Biliteracy

Describing the bilinguality of teachers in a bilingual program may also be complicated. Teachers may have gone to school themselves and been educated as professionals in the students' home language and then received more professional education in the second language. Thus, they may be more literate in the home language than in English, as well as more familiar with oral school registers in the home language (e.g., Cuban teachers in Miami). Or teachers may share the students' home language but have no school experience with it, having been educated only in their second language. These teachers would be considerably more literate in their second language than in their first (e.g., some Chicano teachers in the Southwest, many Haitian teachers educated in French in Haiti). Or teachers may have attended lower grades in the students' home language and then received higher levels of schooling and all professional education in the second language (e.g., teachers who immigrated to the United States in their teens).

Language Use in the Community

Moreover, outside the classroom, the bilingual program students' community is not one that simply "uses language X plus English" or "just" language X. In each community, there will be differences in where and how English and the other language are used. In some places, there may be clear boundaries for the use of one language or the other, with business and government requiring English, and home and religion the other language. In other communities, each language might be able to be used in all settings, but variation within the setting (who is speaking, who is listening, who is listening in, what purposes the language is being used for, how formal or informal the particular moment is) demands a shift from one language to the other (Grosjean, 1982).

Pressure from the "Larger" Context

Other outside contexts--not so nearby as the immediate neighborhood--contribute their own complicating factors to how writing occurs in particular classrooms. What complicates here is not the tremendous variety but the potential for tremendous and often deleterious impact. These more distant, more abstract contexts, which might account for state and regional "climates," national "temper of the times," and prevailing values, become more concrete through school district policies, state legislative and state department policies and mandates, federal statutes, federal agency policies and recommendations, and state and federal court decisions.

Testing, for example, is a central fact to be dealt with in every classroom in the United States. The power of a school's testing program to influence writing

instruction comes from contexts outside the school itself. The general public's faith in tests and testing as valid indicators of learning, educational excellence, teaching, etc. (see Edelsky & Harman, 1988; Meier, 1981, for critiques of tests), the reliance on test data in recent national reports on the state of education, the increased numbers of state-required tests for increased numbers of children, and the growing practice of publishing test scores in local newspapers put much pressure on the teacher and children in any particular classroom. When tests are so central, the language of the tests (usually English) becomes the "real" or important language of the classroom; the tasks demanded by the tests become the "real" tasks, and the way test language is conceptualized (as consisting of small separable components with an emphasis on the most easily measured) becomes the "real" way to think about language.

Mandated tests are tied to other moves in the larger contexts--moves for standardization and control over teachers. One example is pressure for a standard curriculum with a district-established scope and sequence for district-specified objectives. Like standardized tests, small objectives and scope and sequence charts emphasize low-level conventions. They stand in the way of learning to use written language effectively and appropriately for one's own purposes (Brown, 1987).

Still another factor impinging on bilingual programs and all that goes on within them, writing included, is the political climate for bilingual education. Relative to the later 1970s, the climate has deteriorated. Federal guidelines for ensuring children's access to education through a language they can understand are ignored; high ranking federal officials publicly state their opposition to bilingual education; support grows for proposals making English the official language and for curbing any activity (including bilingual education) that would "endanger" the position of English; bilingual education is required to prove its effectiveness (via test scores) to an extent beyond that demanded of other educational "treatments" (Crawford, 1987).

These are just a few of the factors that complicate decisions about written language instruction in bilingual programs. Some of these factors maintain the same general look with minor local variations across all bilingual programs (e.g., pressure from testing). Others vary widely from program to program (e.g., particular home languages, extent and type of teachers' experiences with each of the school languages). This variation is behind our premise that highly specified blanket policies are bound to conflict with the particulars in local cases.

If we are urging policy makers to refrain from being bulls in the subtle china shops of individual community language situations, we are not asking them to be idle. Nor are we promoting extreme "home rule." It is imperative to establish broad state and national policies regarding language rights and educational access for discriminated-against (not just numerical) minorities. Policy makers *must* make *general* policies. They must see bilingual education in the light of

equity issues as they study the diversity within the many publics. The "temper of the times" and "current political climates" are never monoliths connected automatically to one line of action. They have minor keys and single clarion notes; they shift and change. While policy makers cannot ignore prevailing mentalities, they need not slavishly follow them. They can listen to many voices and then *lead* in establishing general policy. They can also write goals based on deep, consensual wishes. For example, in the United States, there is an overwhelming consensus that people want their children to be able to read and write. There is much less agreement on the importance of being able to read particular texts or write particular genres, even less on being able to write particular genres in particular languages. It is up to policy makers to opt for the real (if vague) goal (e.g., we aim to develop literate people) rather than multiple trivialized operationalizations. (Specific smaller goals rarely add up to a widely wished-for ideal. Unfortunately, small supposed subgoals take time away from--and prevent the achievement of--the real one that was wanted all along.) It is equally imperative that policy makers at high governmental levels permit autonomy for those on the local scene, that is, permit local people to develop local policies congruent with broad policies for reaching widely shared goals.

ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN DEVELOPING LOCAL POLICIES

Being closer to classroom scenes, those making the local decisions about writing curricula in bilingual programs are better able to see details in local language situations, but they also must know what to look at. In the following discussion we are not urging local decision makers to acquiesce to each aspect of the local situation, incorporating, for example, racist language attitudes into curriculum policies simply because such attitudes exist in the community. But we do advise decision makers to acknowledge such a condition in order to plan deliberately to offset it.

What then must be considered in local policies regarding writing in a bilingual program? We see four general questions that must be asked, all of them implicating to some extent people's attitudes toward language in general, and written language in particular.

1. What is the nature of written language acquisition?

2. What language resources are available?

3. How are written products treated in each language?

4. What is the value and what are the consequences of being able to write in each language?

Nature of Written Language Acquisition

This first area concerns general principles rather than local conditions. In formulating policies about written language education, the basic question is what is the best current understanding of how language is acquired. From there, policy makers must then come to grips with the details of the local language situation as these relate to the best available notions about written language acquisition.

Like oral language, written language is acquired through actual use. Some of that use occurs during interaction with others who demonstrate while they are actually using written language for real purposes what written language is for and how it works (Harste, Woodward and Burke, 1984; Smith, 1981). In these interactions, meaning-making is central--with the meanings being made for some purpose of the reader/writer (e.g., for killing time, for getting information, for reminding someone, for warning, for getting attention, for keeping track, etc.). On other occasions, the learner is alone but still using a *social* tool. That is, the written language being used and learned is shaped by a culture, governed by conventions shared by other members of the society, subject to social and historical constraints on how and for what it can be used. As with oral language, what is being learned in written language are the systems of rules/conventions/ constraints for exercising freedom-within-cultural-bounds, for making one's own meanings for culturally possible purposes in particular situations. That is, both conventionality and autonomy are critical aspects of oral and written language acquisition. The best "teaching" in oral (Edelsky, 1978; Wells, 1981) and written (Calkins, 1986; Graves, 1983; Hudelson, 1986; Smith, 1981) language acquisition seems to require responding to what the reader/writer is trying to do. This does not mean responding to the child's completion of a worksheet, but to a child's sincere effort to use written language to warn, wonder, inquire, scold, forgive, direct, etc. In order for a learner to have such purposes in school and in order for a teacher to be free to respond to these, both learner and teacher need autonomy to devise their own curricula, to become genuinely engaged. Local decision makers must work hard to encourage the existence of situations in which language can be acquired through real use and eliminate policies that prevent such situations from occurring.

Language Resources

Before making policy decisions about written language in bilingual programs, decision makers must examine the specific context of the local community, including the language resources available to the learners and to the school. Many bilingual educators would argue that the children's primary available language resource is their already developed home language and that this language should be used for initial literacy development. From the perspective of writing and reading as activities in which learners actively compose texts and construct meaning (Lindfors, 1987; Tierney & Pearson, 1983), learners will come to the composing process with greater built-in language resources to create texts if they

are creating them in a language that they control rather than in a language that they are just learning. But learning to write also involves other language resources beyond the oral language itself. One of these resources is texts created by authors other than the learners. These texts will be more or less available depending upon the community language situation.

One reality, common among Native American communities, may be that the native language has never been written down. This situation will mean that bilingual programs will not have available authentic native language texts that learners need, both to read from and to use to construct their own pieces.

A variation of this situation occurs in communities where languages have only recently developed or are still developing and standardizing their written systems. In these cases, relatively few printed materials will have been created. Frequently the creation of texts is delayed by debates about which of several proposed orthographies should be used. For example, some Haitian Creole material in this country is not widely accepted because there is disagreement about which Haitian Creole orthography to accept as the definitive one.

Further, even though native language written texts exist, the community may question the use of the home language in the school. In some cases the use of the language in the school domain is viewed as inappropriate because of the low social status accorded the language. For example, in Haiti, French has a history of high status and prestige; Creole is the lowly language of the poor and uneducated. To this day many Haitians, having internalized the negative attitudes toward Creole, refuse to acknowledge that they speak Creole. These same individuals fight against the use of Creole in the schools and against children learning to write and read in Creole.

In other cases the question of utilizing language resources concerns not the status but the broader issue of the acceptability of vernacular literacy per se. In the Navajo Nation, for example, Navajo traditionally has been the oral language of the home, community and tribal activities, with English the written language for almost all situations. Although Navajo literacy was introduced in the early 1900s, it has been slow to take hold. Many Navajos have associated vernacular literacy with governmental, religious and educational efforts to assimilate the Navajos into mainstream American culture. Therefore teaching children to write and read in Navajo has been viewed by many as the first step toward cultural assimilation, a situation that has led to conflict over whether to make use of readily available written Navajo texts in bilingual classrooms (Spolsky & Irvine, 1982). So while the written language resources may be available, a question remains as to whether they should be used in schools.

Even where the languages in bilingual programs are languages with written traditions, it is often difficult to get the quantity and variety of reading materials that are available in English (Goodman, Goodman & Flores, 1979). Few other

countries in the world have a children's literature/tradebook industry that rivals that of the United States. There are problems in importing books from other countries, and the books tend to be expensive in comparison to books purchased from the United States. Teachers in Spanish-English bilingual programs often express concern about the relative lack of high quality children's books originally written in Spanish, even though some literature has been identified (Schon, 1978). The lack of authentic texts is even more pronounced in less common languages such as Vietnamese and Lao. The question of quantity of materials is also affected by the issue of which dialect certain materials have been written in. This creates real problems in bilingual education programs, as Chicano Spanish speakers complain that they want material written in Chicano or at least Mexican Spanish rather than Cuban or Puerto Rican or Castilian Spanish.

Another complicating factor is the quality of material available in home languages. Learners need real and functional texts (authentic resources) that will demonstrate varieties of "book talk" (e.g., style of written narrative, written exposition, written directions, etc.) and also help them learn to write like readers (e.g., make use of "book talk" as they write, as well as anticipate other readers' responses to their writing) (Goodman, 1987). Many of the non-English language texts do not meet the criteria of variety, natural language and authenticity. Rather, they resemble American basal reading texts in their approach to literacy (see Goodman et al., 1988, for an extensive critique of basal readers). In some cases, local bilingual programs have even created the "readers" themselves, translating or adapting the more mechanistic approaches used in English. In Dade County, Florida, for example, *The Miami Linguistic Readers*, a series of phonics materials written originally for learners of English as a second language, was adapted into Spanish as part of the Spanish Curriculum Development Component. Later the same principles of teaching reading through sound-letter correspondences and syllable patterns were used in the creation of beginning reading materials in Haitian Creole.

A human language resource of critical importance for teaching/learning writing is the teacher. We know that in many "regular" classrooms English speaking teachers do not view themselves as writers and do almost no writing, either for themselves or with their students. One of the assumptions of such in-service education efforts as the National Writing Project and the Bay Area Writing Project is that, in order to become effective writing teachers, teachers must themselves become writers. In other words, to develop literacy in others, teachers must be highly literate themselves. In many bilingual programs, as we have mentioned earlier, teachers have been educated in their second language, and most of the reading and writing that they do occurs in that language. There is a strong possibility, therefore, that teachers do not view themselves as writers in the home language. In fact, many bilingual teachers rather consistently denigrate the variety of home language they speak and lament their lack of ability in that language. If teachers do not view themselves as writers in the home language (indeed, if they do not view themselves even as good speakers), this may affect their support of

their students' writing in the home language. And if teachers do not view themselves as writers at all--either in the home language or in English--how will they nurture children in their development as writers?

Children learning to write need access to others who write. Teachers may serve this role if they write themselves. Additionally, one might assume that another source of access to writers would be the local community. But the case of Navajo, described earlier, demonstrates that any such assumption needs to be examined carefully. Where one might assume that Navajo-speaking adults would write in Navajo, in fact that often is not the case. English is the language most often used for writing by Navajos. If children do not see adults using written Navajo for specific individual or social purposes, they are likely to regard writing in Navajo as an exercise--not as written language for life. If children see adults using writing in any language for a very limited number of purposes, they are unlikely to see a wide range of needs for writing or to incorporate "writer" into their identities. As we look at various communities as possible sources for demonstrations of written language, we must ask questions such as these: Who in the community knows how to write? In what languages do people write? What kinds of writing do people do? For what purposes do people write? How can schools both use and *extend* community resources so that children will become writers?

Treatment of Written Products

Research and theory show that writers learn to write by seeing demonstrations of authentic written language by other users, by writing for real and varied purposes, by sharing what they have written with varied audiences, by utilizing the reactions of others to revisit and revise some of what they create, by working through changes in order to express their intentions in written form. As writers construct meaning, they experiment with forms, generating and testing hypotheses about how written language works and using what they know at that time about written language. Any product a writer produces, therefore, is really a reflection of the ongoing process of creating text. Further, the written products provide evidence of children making use of what they know about written language to work out their ideas, of children solving their problems of expression by using resources available to them, of children controlling the processes of composing.

But not all teachers know this. Many teachers believe that children learn to write by practicing a set of discrete and isolated skills until these have been "mastered." Only then do teachers consider learners able to create text in the sense of working out ideas using written language. Our experience has been that many bilingual program teachers share the latter view of written language acquisition, regardless of whether children are writing in their home or second language (Edelsky, 1986; Hudelson, 1985). This view may reflect conventional wisdom or professional education (for example, many Spanish-speaking teachers

educated in Cuba or Mexico have been taught to teach writing by teaching letter sounds and syllables; many Haitian teachers have learned to direct children to memorize words and take dictation; the writing approach in many United States bilingual programs emphasizes exercises with small segments of language). In any case, evidence mounts that teachers' beliefs about how writing and reading are learned have a direct effect on how they teach (Deford, 1985; DeFord & Harste, 1982), including how they react to student products and student errors.

As one example, here is a short piece written by a first-grade Spanish-speaking child enrolled in a bilingual program that emphasized children's written expression:

> Cuando llo se lla grande boyaser una maestra y boya garar mucho dinero para comprarles as misinos ninos les boya comprar ropa y jugetes.
>
> *Standard Adult Spanish:* Cuando yo sea grande voy a ser una maestra. Y voy a ganar mucho dinero para comprarles a mis niños. Les voy a comprar ropa y juguetes.
>
> *English translation:* When I am an adult I am going to be a teacher. And I am going to earn a lot of money to buy (things) for my children. I am going to buy them clothes and toys.

From one perspective this piece could be viewed as a demonstration of creative problem solving, risk taking and using what one knows about the written system of Spanish to express an idea. The child's invented spellings, unconventional segmentation, cross outs and lack of punctuation might be analyzed in terms of working hypotheses about how written Spanish is organized (Edelsky, 1986; Hudelson, 1981-82). The piece may be used to analyze what the child knows and thinks about written Spanish. But from a different perspective, the piece could be viewed as riddled with mistakes--as a demonstration of the writer's lack of knowledge of sound-letter correspondences, inability to spell words correctly, laziness about punctuation, and forgetfulness about leaving spaces between words. The piece may be used to judge what the child does not know about standard adult forms of the language, instead of what the child knows. Teachers who believe that products such as the one above show children's inability to write may discourage further experimentation, may fail to promote early and sustained writing experiences, and may, in spite of good intentions, actually prevent a child from learning to write effectively.

Teachers' and parents' views of how people acquire written language will affect how they treat children's written products. These views may also have an effect on the kinds of writing that go on in bilingual classrooms and on the

display of this writing. If educators and/or community members believe that writing stories is "a waste of time," this kind of writing may not happen in classrooms. If educators and/or community members are concerned that the use of such writing tools as journals may violate students' rights to privacy (see the SLATE Starter Sheet, October 1985, for a discussion of possible ramifications of the Hatch Amendment), journals may find no place in classrooms. If educators and/or community members believe that to display less than letter perfect writing (in terms of standard forms) is to "encourage sloppy work" or "provide a bad language model for the others," little work may be displayed around classrooms and schools, and/or the same children's work will always (not) be displayed. These may or may not be realities in any given local setting. Questions need to be asked in order to find out what the local beliefs and actions are; efforts must be made to educate teachers and community members about beliefs that interfere with children's development as written language users.

Value and Consequences of Writing Ability

Both transitional bilingual programs (bilingual education is offered only until the child can make the transition into an entirely English curriculum) and maintenance bilingual programs (bilingual education is maintained throughout school, with shifting allocation of curriculum between the two languages) claim that first language writing is important. No matter how it is seen--as an entry to the world of literacy, as a bridge to writing in a new language, as a lifelong ability to be nurtured throughout school, as the ability to perform spelling and punctuation exercises or as the working out of ideas--first language writing has a place in United States bilingual programs. However, having a place does not mean having a place that really counts. Does the first language appear in writing on signs? tests? forms? bulletin boards? Or is it relegated to use on notes to parents who would not otherwise understand? All the various ways print is used in the school affect what is learned about print, including which language has what importance.

The same questions must be asked regarding first language writing outside of school. Being able to write/read in English clearly matters (note the recent mass media campaigns regarding illiteracy). But what about being able to write in Spanish or Hopi or Chinese? How does first language writing function in the students' community? It is necessary to find out who writes in the first language (their social status, age, gender, societal roles) and for what purposes (whether these are private or public) in order to understand, even in part, how students and their families and their communities will view the inclusion of first language writing in the curriculum.

To educators, being able to write is presumed to be empowering. It is necessary (though not sufficient) for access to certain societal resources (e.g., jobs requiring writing) and services initiated or legalized through writing. As a tool for thinking, it offers additional, perhaps unique, opportunities for reasoning, reflection,

interactions with oneself. It expands ways of interacting with others, including increasing the possibility of having a public voice. In a society where tested "literacy levels" help uphold a myth of meritocracy, we learn to consider an inability to read and write as shameful--disempowering in the extreme.

But whether writing has such benefits or not, learning to write can change the status quo for the community as well as the child. In opening up new roles for the writer (and possibilities for new relationships), writing ability in either language can entail social change (Hymes, 1972). Understanding and predicting community reaction to students as writers depends on gathering information under the guidance of an ethnography-of-writing perspective (Swzed, 1981; Woods-Elliott & Hymes, n.d.). For example, communities of newly arrived immigrants may not yet have established any stable pattern to their written language use in the new community. English--oral or written--is only one of the many new features these immigrants have to work into their social and intellectual lives. If the native language of these immigrants has included writing, that too has been disrupted through immigration since print resources (newspapers, signs, books, etc.) and written language networks have changed. As their children learn to write English, what impact does that have? Does it change their relation to family members or community elders and to family members in interaction with the larger mainstream society? If they learn to write in the home language but first language writing in the native country was limited by gender or social class, what happens to social roles as writing ability "spreads"? Or do the children refuse to learn to write in the first language rather than violate native norms?

In contrast with communities of new arrivals, communities made up of either indigenous people or longstanding immigrants are more likely to have stable existent patterns of written language use. The question then is whether learning to write in both the first and second language would produce a challenge to the community's language situation. If it does, it is important to identify who wants the change and who does not. In anticipating whether there will be arguments over first language writing in school in indigenous and established immigrant communities, it is equally important to learn whether first language writing will be a red herring. That is, what other community battles (over traditional versus "modern" ways, over separation and nationhood versus annexation) may underlie disagreements over whether, which, how much, and who learns to write in the first language?

Conclusion

The picture for writing in bilingual programs is indeed complicated. What happens in any given classroom will be influenced by a host of locally varying factors arising for many larger contexts. This means that there can be no uniform, highly specified written language policies or programs that will be effective everywhere. On the other hand, given a combination of local language situation details, neither is there one automatic local policy response. Instead, by addressing

the question areas we have identified, local decision makers can gather the information they need to understand the written language situation in their own communities. Armed with that understanding, they can plan for the situation they want; they can plan for change rather than be surprised by it.

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